

we offer the grace, peace, and promise that comes in the good news of Jesus Christ.

May we trust in a new and deeper way the words of the Psalmist, found in Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea . . . The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

Thanks for being the Church! The Spirit of God is with us, in us and moving through us!

Blessings,



Bishop Mark J. Webb

In Brief

Easing anxiety during the COVID-19 outbreak—a guided meditation using a biblical narrative

The COVID-19 pandemic has created anxiety for many. How can we trust Jesus in such a time as this? The Rev. Nancy Dibelius, the Upper New York Assistant Director of Vital Congregations for Spiritual Life, has graciously provided a video where she offers a guided meditation using a biblical narrative format.

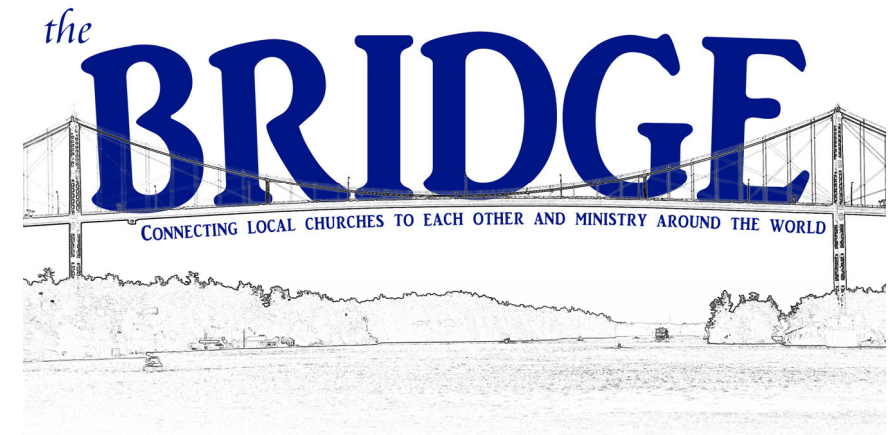


This biblical narrative recited by Rev. Dibelius offers time for pausing and reflecting throughout. Visit <https://bit.ly/biblicalnarrativemeditation> to experience this uplifting spiritual discipline.

The Bridge is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world. For more news and stories visit:

www.unyumc.org

For the latest news and information on COVID-19 visit the Upper New York COVID-19 response page at <http://www.unyumc.org/about/uny-covid-19-response>



The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

A look inside!

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From the Desk of Bishop Mark J. Webb: COVID-19 advice

Editor's Note: On Tuesday March 17, Upper New York (UNY) Area Resident Bishop, Mark J. Webb, sent the following letter to the UNY Conference with words of comfort during the COVID-19 epidemic.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." -Philippians 4.6-7

"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. God will not fail you or forsake you." - Deuteronomy 31.6

Dear Friends in Christ,

We are in the midst of days unlike any most of us have experienced before. The reality and on-going threat of COVID-19 has created anxiety in our lives and requires us to adapt what we consider normal. We join in prayer for the thousands of lives affected by this virus and pray for God's sustaining grace for those who are mourning the death of loved ones.

I give thanks to God for your ministry in the midst of these times and celebrate the creative ways in which you have already responded, as you continue to provide worship and support to members of our faith communities and offer the hope of Jesus Christ to those in our communities.

I am grateful for the leadership of our District Superintendents and Conference staff who are working hard to offer information and resources that allow us to be the Church and even find

new ways to live out our mission. They are working faithfully with us and on our behalf. Our Communications team continues to update resources regarding COVID-19, which can be found here: <https://bit.ly/UNYCovid19resources>. They have also set up a COVID-19 response hotline to help churches adjust to this challenging time through technology and new ideas. If you need any support with technical or creative needs such as online Bible studies/meetings, live streaming worship, or online giving please call (315) 898-2012 or e-mail COVID-19response@unyumc.org. Simply share what support you are seeking and someone will promptly get back to you.

With each new day, the recommendations coming from federal, state, and local authorities adjust as we seek together to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Yesterday, the Trump administration offered national guidelines for the next 15 days that encourage the practice of social distancing. These guidelines include avoiding gathering in groups of more than 10 people. This comes in addition to the CDC recommendation that gatherings of 50 or more be postponed or cancelled for the next eight weeks. Why is this important? The latest studies indicate that people who have contracted COVID-19 often are contagious for three to five days before they are symptomatic.

While I know it goes against the nature of many to cancel worship and other activities for any reason, I want to urge and encourage you to suspend in-person worship and other church gatherings for at least the remainder of March, if you have not already done so.

The United Methodist Center in Liver-

pool has closed to the public through Monday, Apr. 13. During this time most staff will work remotely, but there should be little interruption in day-to-day services. In addition, following the most recent CDC guidelines, the United Methodist Center will not host gatherings of more than 50 individuals for the next eight weeks. We will begin to review the options before us for the session of Annual Conference scheduled for late May in the beginning weeks of April.

As we live into this time, we want to support, encourage, and equip you in any way we can. Please do not hesitate to contact your District Superintendent or any of the Conference staff regarding questions or assistance we may offer.

Whether we gather for worship on-line or hold our Bible studies and meetings on-line, the call to be the Church of Jesus Christ continues. Let us continue to care deeply for one another and look out for the most vulnerable among us. Let us continue to engage our communities by being the hands and feet of Christ in whatever ways God leads.

It is always in times like these that the Spirit of God breaks through and accomplishes things we can only dream and imagine about. It has always been and will continue to be God's plan to use God's people as a vehicle for this work. This may be one of the greatest moments for the Church of Jesus Christ in a long time!

Be open to how God may desire to use you in the lives of others. What new opportunities to care for the elderly in your community may God offer? How might your congregation assist families with the unexpected need for child-



care? How might you engage in providing the basic needs of food and other supplies? What opportunities for prayer and sharing your faith in Christ with others may God provide?

As we stay open to God's invitations, I encourage each of us to be faithful in the giving of our tithes and offerings, whether through electronic giving or by mailing offering envelopes to our Church. It will ensure your local congregation is able to respond to the needs as they arise. The people of Upper New York have always been generous people who respond to the call of God and I know that will continue through this time.

I am incredibly grateful for each of you and hold you deeply in prayer. Again, please let us know if there are ways in which we can partner with you, as together during these anxious times

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